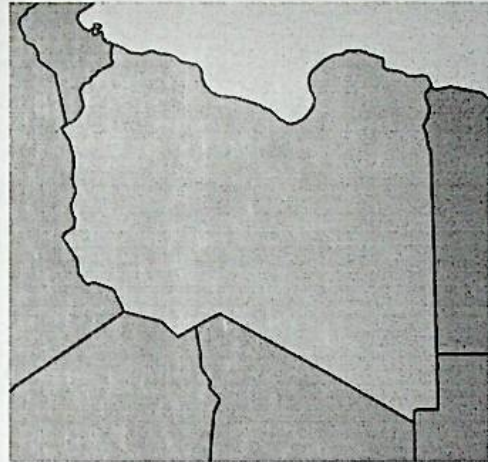

Libya

Mar 13-18

Khalifa Haftar's troops regained control of the oil crescent area this week.



Diplomacy

The President of the Tripoli Council of State, Abdel Rahman al Sahwili, travelled to Doha this week on an official visit to Qatar. According to Qatar news agency "Qna", he was welcomed at the Doha airport by Emir Abdel Monsef al Buri's Chief of Protocol. The two-day visit was organised on invitation from Qatar's government "to discuss the Libyan crisis with Emir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamed al Thani and members of the government".

The press office of the unrecognised Libyan transitional government based in al Bayda announced this week that Prime Minister Abdullah al Thani would make a surprise visit to Egypt. The office stressed that al Thani will visit Cairo "on this important visit that aims to garner support for the Libyan army from countries bordering Libya and to clarify the role of terrorist groups that have attacked the oil crescent". Al Thani confirmed he was confident that "the Libyan forces", in reference to those under General Khalifa Haftar, "will defeat the terrorists in the oil crescent".

US and Egyptian sources have reported the presence of Russian troops in an Egyptian airbase near the Libyan border, said "al Jazeera". An anonymous US official said: "We observed the presence of Russian forces and their planes in the Sidi Burani area roughly 100 kilometres from the border between Egypt and Libya". The reports have been confirmed by Egyptian security forces sources but denied by the Egyptian Armed Forces Spokesman, Colonel Tamer al Refai, who said that "no foreign force is present in our territory". However, there were reports that Russian military planes transported six military units to the Marsa Matrouh area to prepare entry into Libya. The Commander of the Libyan Air Forces under Khalifa Haftar and head of the Benghazi Benina airbase, Mohammed al Manfur, has denied the presence of Russian instructors in eastern Libya. In an interview with "Sputnik", he said that "any meeting or agreement with the Russians takes place officially through the Russian government and the Libyan Army Command, such as Haftar's recent visit to Russia on an official invitation. Any future agreement will be part of official relations".

UN Envoy Martin Kobler's successor "will not be an Arab", a western diplomatic source told "al Wasat". There was dispute from Israel and several members of the US Administration following reports that former Palestinian prime minister Salam Fayyad would be appointed as UN Envoy to Libya on nomination from Secretary General Antonio Guterres. Last month, Libyan diplomatic sources said the US Administration had obstructed the appointment.

Politics

The Commander of the self-proclaimed Libyan National Army (LNA), Khalifa Haftar, has met with a delegation

from the Benghazi tribe of Maghariba, led by Sheikh Saleh al Atiush. The meeting took place in Haftar's offices in al Rajma, eastern Libya. According to Haftar's press office on Facebook, "the meeting took place as part of the growing support that tribal chiefs, sheikhs and mayors are offering to Haftar and to confirm their support of the Libyan Army in the fight against terrorism and to establish a state of law". Haftar's forces are engaged in operations against Islamist militants in the "number 12" buildings located between Bousanib and the village of al Majaris in Ganfouda, Benghazi. Several families are trapped in the area without food or water. Over recent days, mediators have been attempting to rescue these families, one of which, a former member of Gaddafi's regime, Omar Salem Ashkal, was killed in bombing from Haftar's forces. Haftar also met with the tribal chiefs from two of the most important clans in Libya, al Obeid and Warfalla, in order to garner support for his army. According to a statement from his press office, "Haftar met with the clan leaders who offered their support to the armed forces in the fight against terrorism and who condemned the recent attacks in the oil crescent".

Libyan Speaker Aguila Saleh will suspend political dialogue until "the other party condemns the attack on the oil crescent", in reference to the Tripoli Government of National Accord (GNA) and the clashes underway in the area between Haftar's forces and the Benghazi Defence Brigades. "We want to understand in this way if our counterpart intends to reach a true reconciliation between all Libyans", said Saleh in a statement. He added that the attack on the oil crescent "was launched by a group of fundamentalists led by people known for their links to al Qaeda".

Security

A spokesman from the self-proclaimed LNA has announced the "complete liberation" of the Ras Lauf and Sidra terminals. "The Armed Forces have completely liberated the oil crescent", said Khalifa al Abidi in reference to the strategic area of the Gulf of Sirte. Photos have been published on social networks showing LNA men celebrating in what appears to be Ras Lanuf. For the past week, clashes have been underway while Haftar's forces have been conducting airstrikes against the Benghazi Defence Brigades positions. On March 3, the Benghazi Defence Brigades, a formation of Islamist fighters and anti-Gaddafi revolutionaries, took control of the two crude oil terminals from Haftar and delivered them to the Petroleum Facilities Guards (PFG) under the GNA Presidential Council, recognised by the UN as the only legitimate Libyan government. On Sept. 11, LNA forces gained control of the terminal with the National Oil Company (NOC) was able to reactivate exports. LNA Spokesman Colonel Ahmed al Mismari said that "10 have been killed and 18 injured in the operation launched this week to liberate the oil crescent". Referring to the offensive on Ras Lanuf and Sidra, al Mismari added that his forces "are chasing the terrorist groups west of Ben Jawad, in al Nawafiliya and al Harawa". He added that "the army has taken control of Ras Lanuf, Sidra and Ben Kawad". The Benghazi Defence Brigades said in a statement that they are still stationed near the oil crescent and that the LNA airstrikes targeted the PFG. Ibrahim Jadhra, former head of the PFG, has been kidnapped by an armed group in Nalut, Tripolitania, near the Tunisian border, sources from Nalut and the nearby city of Kabaw told "Libya Herald". The website added that the reports have not yet been confirmed by the authorities.

Based on news from the following Libyan newspaper and websites: Ean Libia, al Wasat, Libya al Mustakbal, Libya Herald, Libyan News Agency Lana, al Hayat, al Quds al Arabi, al Arabiya, Sky Arabia, al Youm.